

**MODULE A: Genre**

**Elective 2: Crime Writing**



Working from the Syllabus

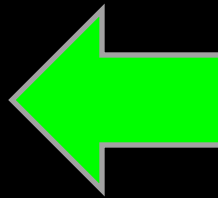
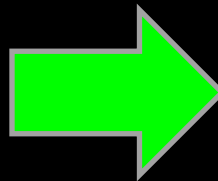
“changing contexts and values have brought about changes in the traditional crime stories and resulted in new conventions, new understandings of what constitutes a crime and who plays the role of detective and even what ‘justice’ means.”

# **The Story**

# **How it is told**

**The effect of context  
and values on the  
shaping of the story**

**Crime writing  
conventions – does it  
comply with or  
subvert them:  
the role of the  
detective, the police,  
the crime, the clues  
and how the crime is  
solved**



## **Directorial choices:**

**actors  
action  
shots  
camera angles  
editing  
script  
costume  
sound  
design of the mise-  
en-scene**

## The Story

### ‘changing contexts and values’

#### Post World War II America



- McCarthyism and the loss of faith in public officials and distrust with the representatives of justice
- General distrust of the person next door who may have communist sympathies or be involved in communist activities. From 1941 -57 it was illegal to be a member of the Communist Party
- Empowerment of ordinary people to take an active role in policing their own worlds - to be vigilant and watchful

# ‘changing contexts and values’

## Post World War II America

“a more personal kind of menace”

“a brave new world in which we are becoming conditioned to suspect our neighbours and expecting the worst”

*Alfred Hitchcock*

# The Story

## Post World War II America

- Optimism
- Consumerism
- The rise of 'glamour' – Christian Dior's *New Look*
- Changing roles and attitudes of women after war-time employment



## Genre in film

### Genres are paradoxical

- They repeat generic formulas that 'work' and yet shift and modernize generic conventions.
- Audiences expect familiarity as well as change and innovation.
- Film is rarely generically pure. They **rework, extend** and **transform** the norms that codify them.
- Changes to genre reflect social change and audience expectations

## Genre in film

Genre is always *in play* rather than being, simply, re-played



# Detective film genre

The detective film genre aims to create curiosity about past story events (e.g. who killed whom), suspense about up-coming events, and surprise with respect to unexpected disclosures about the story.

To promote all three emotional states, the narration must limit the viewer's knowledge.

We learn what the detective learns, when she or he learns it. By restricting the range of knowledge to that possessed by the detective, the narration can present information in a fairly unselfconscious way, we pick up fabula information by following the detective's inquiry.

*Narration in the Fiction Film* – David Bordwell

### New /old conventions

- *The Daughter of Time* by Josephine Tey (1951) . A detective investigates a historical crime from his hospital bed
- The private eye outsmarting the police – hardboiled and classic detective stories etc
- Social class and sophistication – in English crime writing detectives were often from wealthy and educated backgrounds

## New /old conventions

### Jeff

- not a detective but well educated, sophisticated
- his profession gives him particular skills – he looks and makes meaning and stories with photographs
- placed in an unusual situation which is the opposite of his active and adventurous life and a ‘one-off’ – detecting is not a hobby
- has a friendship with a policeman rather than a professional relationship

## The Story

### subversions and transformations

- The 'trapped' detective – inactive and powerless
- The woman as agent – acting on his and her own behalf
- The tracking and surveillance of the criminal before the crime, no need for the conventional witness statements to fill the 'back-story'



"It is not a tale of 'who did it' whereby the viewer awaits to see if the detective can solve the crime rather one waits to see if Jeff's hypothesis is true"

# subversions and transformations

- The apartment complex becomes the 'closed world' of traditional 'country house' or village detective stories'
- The detective's helper or 'side-kick' is also his girlfriend
- The crime is uncovered by the 'detective' rather than being brought to him to be solved – Jeff discovers and solves the crime



## The Story: narrative structure

# Dual Narratives, dualities and binary oppositions

## The Romance

Will Jeff and Lisa  
break up?

Man of action  
and adventure  
becomes  
dependant on a  
woman

'High  
maintenance'  
dependant  
woman becomes  
woman of action  
and adventure



## The murder mystery

Has Thorwald  
killed Mrs  
Thorwald?

Can Jeff prove  
she was  
murdered?

Can Lisa find the  
evidence?

## The Couples

Thorwald cares  
for an invalid  
wife

Lisa cares for an  
invalid boyfriend

## How the story is told

### The auteur – Alfred Hitchcock

Although adapted from a novel by Cornell Woolrich, and written by John Michael Hayes, Alfred Hitchcock is considered to be the author (or auteur) because of his composition of the mise-en-scene according to *Auteur Theory* which was first discussed by French film theorists. Francois Truffaut had a major role in valuing Alfred Hitchcock and his films beyond Hollywood.

**Truffaut's theory maintains that all good directors (and many bad ones) have such a distinctive style or consistent theme that their influence is unmistakable in the body of their work.**

mise-en-scene =  
everything that  
appears before  
the camera



# The auteur – Alfred Hitchcock and *Rear Window*



## Distinctive style and themes

- the visual – use the visual component of film to create reactions in the viewer eg the building of suspense
- scopophilia – the act and love of looking
- voyeurism – looking through windows or at the lives of others
- The master of delay – the audience knows something is going to happen but when?

*"Once the screenplay is finished, I'd just as soon not make the film at all...I have a strongly visual mind. I visualize a picture right down to the final cuts."*



mise-en-scene = everything that appears before the camera

You must pay attention to everything in the film that has meaning:

- objects – a close reading of the opening scene as a introduction to character
- sound- diegetic and non-diegetic and its role in setting mood
- lighting – how it is used to create suspense and indoor /outdoor experience
- placement of the actors within the scene – vectors created by the shapes
- setting – how is this used to give meaning?

"I make it a rule to exploit elements that are connected with a character or a location; I would feel that I'd been remiss if I hadn't made maximum use of those elements,"

## The opening sequence: the viewer as detective, reading the clues

- The shot out the window positions the viewer as voyeur and introduces the way which the director wants you to view the film
- Jeff's smashed camera answers the question about how he brakes his leg
- Action images show us the kind of man he is...
- The viewer sees what Jeff sees out the window: a selection of stories that he can switch between
- Shot reverse shot sequences suture the viewer into the experience and induces empathy with characters





Viewing: suturing the viewer into the experience with shot-reverse-shot – a montage to evoke emotions

The subjective view – Jeff's face and what he's looking at















“Tell me everything you saw and what you think it means”

## Tools of the trade and the shadow



Suspense through shot-reverse-shot









# *Rear Window* - a life of its own

Its value beyond a work of Crime Writing

General popularity

Academia – film theorists

Feminist criticism

Spectatorship and the Gaze

Internet resources:

The Geometry of Terror - [http://www.ark.fi/ark4\\_97/hitchcoche1.html](http://www.ark.fi/ark4_97/hitchcoche1.html)

*Narration in the Fiction Film* – David Bordwell

